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Identity and world order in India's post-Cold War foreign policy discourse

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the dominant conception of world order in India's post-Cold War foreign policy discourse. Drawing on a poststructuralist, discourse-theoretical framework, I argue that the discourse uses foreign policy and world order as sites for the (re-)production of India's identity by placing India into a system of differences that constitutes 'what India is'. The article shows that India's foreign policy discourse frames world order in accordance with India's own national experiences and thus seeks to upheave India's identity to a position from where it can represent the universal: a global political community. This notion of Indian Exceptionalism constitutes the affective dimension of the discourse that obscures the absence of an extra-discursive foundation on which national identities could be grounded by endowing the Self with an imaginary essence and seemingly unique qualities.

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Introduction

The rise of so-called emerging powers such as China, India or Brazil is believed to transform the international system and to pose a challenge to the Western-liberal world order.¹ All too often, however, the 'global power shifts' literature derives their future political clout directly from their growing economic (and military) capabilities, thus suggesting that the possession of certain material characteristics will automatically lead to a particular foreign policy behaviour. This rather materialistic and deterministic reading also reflects the Western-centrism of international relations (IR),² which attributes to non-Western states often only an inferior agency and neglects the way in which these states conceptualise and practise world politics. Against this backdrop, this article examines how the foreign policy discourse of India – a state located outside the Western 'core' and widely believed to be emerging as an influential power pole – endows world order with meaning and constitutes India's identity in this order.

Though India's 'rise' has attracted much scholarly attention,³ there exists no systematic, theory-led study on Indian world order models in the IR literature. Hence, it remains unclear

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how India will engage and shape the world order. While some scholars claim that India has no world order concept or guiding foreign policy frameworks in the post-Cold War era,⁴ Sagar and Bajpai claim that there are various distinct schools of strategic thought that inform India's contemporary foreign policy.⁵ However, they provide no analytical framework that would make transparent how they identified these schools and explain what their ontological status is. For example, do these schools merely reflect the 'reality' of world politics or are they making this reality meaningful in the first place? In addition, Sagar and Bajpai rely to a great extent on texts by the leaders of India's independence movement such as Nehru and prominent policy commentators rather than studying the 'worldviews' of contemporary Indian policymakers. Nevertheless, both argue that a (neo)liberal school, which views non-alignment as obsolete and embraces economic pragmatism, globalisation and the promotion of India's self-interests, shapes Indian foreign policymaking. This corresponds to the common assertion found in contemporary studies on Indian foreign policy which argue that India has shifted from Nehruvian 'idealism' to a foreign policy driven by 'realism' or 'pragmatism'.⁶

Though India gradually liberalised its economy and redefined its relations with the major powers, in particular with the US, in the post-Cold War era, this reading cannot explain some significant continuities in Indian foreign policy such as the resilience of the notion of non-alignment or why India – despite its status as liberal democracy – is still rather hesitant in supporting the liberal international order.⁷ Constructivist studies explain this continuity and India's role in global politics with reference to India's identity as an 'exceptional' or 'ambivalent' actor that defies 'great power politics', 'leads by the power of its example' or is a 'symbol of peaceful coexistence'.⁸ By studying how identities shape foreign policy, constructivist-inspired accounts run the risk of essentialising the concept of identity and re-producing nationalistic, ethnocentric accounts of world politics which often come uncomfortably close to the official foreign policy orientations of the respective countries – a tendency, as critics point out,⁹ that we find in 'Post-Western IR'¹⁰ in general and that might indicate the need for a more critical approach.

Drawing on a poststructuralist, discourse-theoretical approach, this article seeks to offer an alternative analytical framework that allows us to go beyond Western-centric IR by drawing on Indian textual sources and examining how these texts conceptualise 'world order' *without* essentialising India or reproducing an Indo-centric account of world politics. From a poststructuralist point of view, identities and meanings are not given or stable but discursively constructed and thus constituted against the difference of an Other.¹¹ Building on this insight, this article goes beyond a purely descriptive account of India's conception of world order and investigates how the meaning of world order is constructed in India's foreign policy discourse by analysing how the discourse relates the Indian Self to a series of Others. Based on the discourse analysis of Indian foreign policy texts, the article identifies the dominant discourse through which Indian policymakers have made sense of global politics in the post-Cold War era. This discourse can be characterised as post-Nehruvian in that it draws on established tenets of Indian foreign policy such as non-alignment but also goes beyond them. Instead of embracing a (neo)liberal worldview as often suggested, Indian policymakers rather sought to redefine existing foreign policy frameworks and adapt them to the globalised, post-Cold War world.

The post-Nehruvian discourse represents India not as a direct stakeholder of the Western-liberal world order but as an independent, multi-aligned actor that should strive for a polycentric order. The discourse frames world order in accord with India's national experiences and seeks to upheave India to a position from where it can claim to represent the universal: the possibility of a political community that can, despite its differences, live in peaceful

co-existence. This assertion is typically seen as an expression of Indian Exceptionalism which – like similar claims in other countries – attributes the nation a moral or cultural uniqueness and superiority.¹² Given the purely relational character of identities, national identities are in permanent need of re-production and thus depend on difference. By understanding foreign policy as a practice that differentiates the Self from various international Others, the discourse-analytical approach applied here shows how foreign policy and world order are used as sites for the re-production of a particular representation of Indian identity. As we will see, this explains why Indian policymakers simultaneously desire recognition of India by Western states but also seek to assert India's autonomy. In addition, it sheds light on the ontological significance of the notion of Indian Exceptionalism discussed by constructivist scholars: The notion symbolises – what Lacanian psychoanalytic theory¹³ calls – a fantasy through which discourses over mask the essential incompleteness of identities and ensure that the discursive character of (what we view as) social reality remains in the background. The fantasy of exceptionalism endows the Indian nation with an imaginary, transcendental essence by placing it into a seemingly coherent narrative and projecting everything that challenges this secure and stable sense of Self onto the Other.

The article is divided into four sections. The first section outlines the article's theoretical and methodological framework. In particular, it discusses the relationship between foreign policy, identity and discourse and introduces the logics-approach¹⁴ as guide for the discourse analysis. The second section sets out the main pillars of the post-Nehruvian conception of world order. The third section discusses how the discourse constitutes meanings and identities by relating Self and Others, and the final section sketches the fantasmatic narrative of Indian Exceptionalism.

Discourse, foreign policy and world order

Building on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's poststructuralist discourse theory (PDT), which breaks with the common distinction between a discursive (linguistic or ideational) and a non-linguistic (or material) realm, this article understands a discourse as a relational and differential system of signification that creates a field of intelligibility whereby a particular 'reality' can be apprehended and acted upon.¹⁵ Accordingly, the meanings and identities of subjects/objects do not depend either on reference to a world 'out there' or on ideas we have about an external reality, but are the result of an 'articulatory practice' that establishes 'a relation among elements such that their identity is modified' and creates a relational structure through which subjects, objects, words and actions become meaningful.¹⁶ However, given their relational and differential character, discourses can never ultimately fix meanings and are thus contingent and open for political contestation, because no articulation can exhaust all possible meanings a signifying element can obtain.¹⁷

Against this backdrop, a state is no pre-discursive entity with an objective essence or stable identity but constituted in relation to something that it is not – a shared negativity. By 'demarcating' an "inside" from an "outside", a "self" from an "other", a "domestic" from a "foreign", as David Campbell has argued, foreign policy plays a crucial role in the constitution and re-production of a state's identity.¹⁸ Antagonisms, however, do not symbolise the clash of social forces with already constituted – oppositional – identities and interests, but emerge from the very process of identity formation which always presupposes that there is an Other against which this identity can be constructed.¹⁹ Foreign policy and identity mutually

constitute each other in that the formation of the identity is achieved through this boundary-drawing practice, but the identity is simultaneously constructed as the legitimisation for the proposed policy.²⁰

As states or nations have no essence, their identities are in permanent need of re-production by differentiating the Self from a series of Others. While poststructuralists have typically focussed on how identities are constructed against the difference of an Other, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory can illuminate the underlying dynamics that generate and sustain this process of Othering. Accordingly, the lack of a stable, extra-discursive foundation on which our identities could be grounded (due to the purely relational character of identities) creates anxieties, insecurities and desires within the subject and motivates it to identify with a discourse that promises to fill this lack and provide the Self with a sense of wholeness, certainty and stability.²¹ This is captured by the psychoanalytic concept of fantasy. In contrast to the common understanding of fantasy as 'illusion' or 'false consciousness', fantasy denotes here the mechanisms through which the missing essence or fullness of subjects is concealed in discourses. A fantasy can be conceptualised as a distinctive form of narrative. It constructs a seemingly stable, natural or transcendental foundation on which the imaginary essence of the Self can be grounded (eg nature, religion or ancient epics) and places the Self in a linear, coherent story that is often characterised by an imaginary origin, a moment of purity, grandeur and perfection, which has been lost and must be recovered, or an ideal of a glorious, consummate future, whose realisation is blocked by something: the Other.²² Hence, fantasies are not fictions that distort how things 'really' are, but obscure the discursive character of what we view as social reality by projecting the ontological lack onto the Other and thereby promising the Self a state of wholeness once the Other is overcome.

Given the absence of any foundations on which meanings and identities could be permanently stabilised, PDT highlights the struggle for discursive hegemony and thus how particular meanings could prevail as the 'natural' or 'normal' understandings of the world and become 'common sense'. A hegemonic constellation has emerged, if a certain particularity (of interests, demands, subjects, etc.) is represented as the universal in the sense that it is naturalised and the same reality is reflected in the discursive practices of all relevant actors.²³

A world order is the outcome of a successful struggle for discursive hegemony through which a particular representation of world politics is upheaved to a (seemingly) universal status.²⁴ Laclau conceptualises the universal – in our case world order – as an 'empty' space or signifier in that it is overdetermined with (potential) meanings and ultimately unreachable,²⁵ because it can only be filled by 'a particular social force [that] assumes the representation of a totality that is radically incommensurable with it'.²⁶ Against this backdrop, this article examines how India's dominant foreign policy discourse seeks to fill the empty signifier of world order with meaning by universalising India's own particular experiences and identity. As we will see, this assertion has two objectives: first, the discourse uses foreign policy and world order as sites for the re-production of a particular representation of Indian identity: the notion of India as symbol of peaceful co-existence; second, it contests the Western discursive hegemony, which represents the West as the main political and normative agent in the world. By claiming that India has found a way for the peaceful contention of differences, the discourse aims to forge a counter-hegemonic project in which India is a crucial building block of a 'true' world order and thereby enhance India's agency, status and power in global politics.

For the analysis of India's foreign policy discourse and its conception of world order, the article used a data corpus consisting of English-speaking, publicly available government and party documents, speeches, statements and publications by Indian policymakers and government advisers, and parliamentary debates. In total, the dataset comprised roughly 11,000 documents. The period of investigation covers India's entire post-Cold War foreign policy till spring 2014, when the tenure of the Congress-led government ended. The article will limit itself to (what was identified in the discourse analysis as) the hegemonic foreign policy discourse in India during this time period.

Drawing on the model of *Logics of Critical Explanation* put forward by Glynos and Howarth and applying it to the study of foreign policy, I distinguish among three different sets of logics underpinning discourses: social, political and fantasmatic. Generally, a logic captures the various conditions that make a social practice or order (ie a set of institutions, practices and identities) possible, 'tick' or 'work', and vulnerable.²⁷ *Social logics* denote the content of a particular discourse and thus capture – in our case – what 'world order' means and implies for policymakers subscribing to this specific discourse. *Political logics* refer to the (re-)production of meanings and identities in the discourse by relating the Self to a series of Others. *Fantasmatic logics* capture how discourses seek to conceal their contingency and thus the missing essence of subjects. This enables us, inter alia, to comprehend why subjects desire to identify with a discourse and take it to be 'real'. Fantasmatic logics can be analysed as narratives, ie simplified and mythical stories that order experiences by placing actors and events into a seemingly linear, coherent story in which everything that contradicts this linear story is excluded or projected onto the Other.

For exploring what meaning is conferred to the signifier 'order' in India's foreign policy discourse, the article initially searched in the textual material for appearances of the term 'order' and analysed the context in which the term appeared. Words or signifiers acquire their meanings never out of themselves or by their composition, but only in relation to other signifiers. Context thus refers to the textual surroundings, ie the sentences or paragraphs in which a word is used, or other themes that the texts cover. In doing so, the discourse analysis could identify those words that are normally directly linked to the signifier 'order', namely 'multipolar order' or 'polycentric order', and find signifiers that are frequently used in concordance with the term 'order', such as 'international scenario', and extend the analysis to these signifiers. Then, it identified the words, themes or issues that these texts relate to 'order' and thereby discerned the elements or content of 'order' (eg state sovereignty or non-violence). Having identified the signifiers – or social logics – that are subsumed under the label of 'order' in the body of texts, the article analysed their meaning by situating them in their respective textual context. For example, who or what is named as a threat or challenge to this 'order' and its main pillars, or what practices are associated with the logic?

By analysing a wide range of Indian foreign policy texts, the article sought to reconstruct the dominant interpretative framework through which Indian policymakers rather than scholars make sense of world order and India's role in it. Instead of randomly selecting a limited number of documents or using standalone statements made by Indian policymakers, the article searched for general patterns in language use and thus for the *inter-subjective* meaning-systems that inform India's conception of world order. At the same time, it goes beyond the mere study of these meaning-systems by examining how and why particular meanings have been constructed within the discourses. As discourses construct a field of intelligibility that delineates what can be meaningfully said and done, they give content to

India's interests and condition possible policy options. This helps us, for instance, to understand why Indian policymakers continued to use the rhetoric of non-alignment in the post-Cold War era and why they do not see India as a direct stakeholder of the Western-liberal world order.

The post-Nehruvian discourse and world order

The post-Nehruvian discourse and its conception of world order can be characterised through five interrelated social logics: international unity in diversity, state sovereignty, enlightened self-interest, non-violence and non-discrimination. The discourse is articulated around the nodal point of strategic autonomy and constructs India as an independent and pluralist actor which should engage all major powers and pursue a policy of multi-alignment.²⁸ Accordingly, India seeks partnerships with a wide range of states and cooperates with multiple actors in shifting coalitions and different issues areas, while avoiding strategic entanglements and one-sided dependencies.²⁹ While the Nehruvian discourse linked non-alignment to the Cold War equation and India's state-directed, socialist economic policy, the post-Nehruvian discourse, which emerged after the end of the Cold War, translates non-alignment into strategic autonomy and modifies its meaning by linking it to India's policy of economic liberalisation and the new challenges and opportunities of the post-Cold War world. As then-foreign secretary Nirupama Rao explained in 2011:

driving our foreign policy priorities and our desire for strategic autonomy ... [is] the need for sustained economic growth, our energy security, maritime security and of course access to technology and innovation to sustain our economic growth. ... In order to modernise our country, we need to, and I believe we have succeeded in, forging well-rounded strategic relationships and partnerships with all the major powers.³⁰

In contrast to the common assertion that the end of the Cold War 'hammered the final nail in the coffin of non-alignment',³¹ Indian policymakers believed that 'the essence and logic of non-alignment' – ie 'the pursuit of an independent foreign policy' – 'have not changed but they have to be applied in a vastly transformed international landscape'.³² In this sense, the post-Nehruvian discourse neither marks a radical break with the past nor constructs a fundamentally different notion of world order. Rather, the discourse both draws on and goes beyond the Nehruvian discursive project, whereby it also attempts to generate political support for the changes in India's economic and foreign policy.

The five different social logics through which world order is represented in the post-Nehruvian discourse indicate what world order means and applies to those policymakers who draw on this discourse. The post-Nehruvian discourse seeks to establish a direct link between India's identity and world order. Through the *social logic of international unity in diversity*, the discourse takes pluralism or polycentrism as the foundational and necessary condition of world order.³³ Accordingly, a world order must 'promote an ideology of holism, which embraces coexistence, plurality and tolerance'³⁴ and provide an institutional framework that can accommodate global interdependence and multiple stakeholders with different cultures, political systems, interests and traditions. In this world order, states 'coexist and cooperate with each other in a series of networked relationships, including bilateral and plurilateral strategic partnerships that often overlap with each other, rather than in fixed alliances or binary either/or antagonisms'.³⁵ Unlike multipolarity, a polycentric order is 'profoundly

influenced by globalization³⁶ and 'marked by the preponderance of several major powers, with minimal likelihood of direct conflict amongst these powers, but where both cooperation and competition among them are intense'.³⁷

For the post-Nehruvian discourse, such a polycentric world resembles India in that it displays a similar diversity, heterogeneity and complexity like the Indian society and is confronted with the same challenge: to accommodate differences. In this sense, the discourse grants India's national experiences and identity based on the ideal of 'unity in diversity' universal significance and projects them onto the global order.³⁸ As then-Prime Minister (PM) Manmohan Singh claimed, for example, in 2007:

This 'idea of India' is the idea of 'unity in diversity'. The idea of pluralism, the idea that there need be no 'conflict of civilizations', the idea that it is possible for us to facilitate and work for a 'confluence of civilizations'. These ideas, I believe, have a universal, a truly global relevance. In a world enveloped by the darkness of conflict and hatred, these ideas come as rays of sunshine, lighting up our lives, giving us hope, renewing our faith in our common humanity.³⁹

In this Indo-centric view, India becomes the symbol of world order, the possibility of a global political community, and naturally assumes a privileged role in global politics. The logic presupposes that India has a 'diverse identity', represents 'multiple interests' and can thus be 'a unique bridge between different worlds',⁴⁰ because India is a non-Western, developing, post-colonial country, but at the same time a successful democracy in a multi-religious, multi-linguist and multi-ethnic state. This would make India a potentially attractive partner for a variety of countries, ranging from the United States to Iran, and allow India to pursue a policy of multi-alignment. Existing accounts of multi-alignment usually conceptualise it as a rational strategy to achieve what Indian policymakers perceive as India's core interests, values and security challenges and as a means to upheave India's status in the world.⁴¹ While the post-Nehruvian discourse certainly represents multi-alignment as a rational strategy to achieve these objectives, it also uses multi-alignment to establish a close link between Indian policies and identity in that foreign policy becomes a site for the re-production of a particular notion of Indian identity: India is a pluralist and secular country that can, both in its domestic and international affairs, accommodate differences.

Though the post-Nehruvian discourse embraces the aspiration for an international political community, it emphasises through the *social logic of state sovereignty* that the 'nation-state is still the basic unit of international security'; as then-national security adviser Shivshankar Menon stated in 2011, '[s]overeignty and territorial integrity remain the foundation of the international system, as do traditional security concerns and zero-sum competition between nation states'.⁴² A foreign policy informed by this logic highlights in particular the independence of decision-making. Major foreign policy debates in India (eg on the Indo-US nuclear agreement), therefore, usually boil down to questions of national sovereignty and autonomy.⁴³ In addition, the logic emphasises the non-interference into the internal affairs of other states and therefore opposes the newly emerging norm of the 'responsibility to protect' (R2P).⁴⁴ While acknowledging that the 'responsibility to protect its population is one of the foremost responsibilities of every state',⁴⁵ the discourse opposes the third pillar of R2P that provides for coercive measures, fearing that the norm will be invoked by powerful states to gloss over the pursuit of brute self-interests and thus be used selectively and discriminatorily.⁴⁶ However, while advocating a sovereignty-oriented foreign policy on the global level and demanding that India's sovereignty is respected, the

post-Nehruvian discourse's commitment to the sovereign equality of states can – under certain circumstances – be overridden by the concerns and interests of major powers such as India in South Asia or Russia in its 'near abroad'.⁴⁷ Accordingly, smaller states cannot necessarily claim full sovereignty in international relations.

This points to the *social logic of enlightened self-interest* which underpins the post-Nehruvian discourse and characterises world politics as competitive and driven by the self-interests of states. All states attempt to maximise their own interests and thus India too must be guided by its self-interest.⁴⁸ India's main self-interest is 'to promote and maintain a peaceful and stable external environment in which the domestic tasks of inclusive economic development and poverty alleviation can progress rapidly and without obstacles'.⁴⁹ While the logic suggests that 'India's national interest must be protected to the fullest possible extent',⁵⁰ it 'enlightens' the national interest by cautioning that the unrestrained pursuit of self-interests at the expense of the interests of other states would have devastating consequences for all states, including India.⁵¹ As then-External Affairs Minister (EAM) Salman Khurshid noted in 2012:

It is true that international relations are ultimately about your own welfare and it is about your own interest. But that same interest can be an enlightened self-interest or it can be a narrow self-interest. And I do believe that in spite of the changing balance between principles and pragmatism, India's approach of enlightened self-interest survives.⁵²

The *social logic of non-violence* serves as an ideal for the conduct of inter-state relations and endorses the peaceful settlement of conflicts – through dialogue, diplomacy, trade, people-to-people contacts, etc. – enshrined in the United Nations (UN) charter. The logic denies neither the existence of the reality of conflicts nor the continuing relevance of military force in international relations, but questions the inevitability of violence and its utility for conflict resolution.⁵³ Though the logic of non-violence stipulates caution in acquiring and using military power, it does not rule out the use of force or discards the importance of conventional and nuclear deterrence. Hinting at the moralism in Nehru's foreign policy, PM Singh noted in 2005, 'international relations are ultimately power relations, based on real-politik, not on sentiment. And howsoever, we may regret it, international relations are not a morality play'.⁵⁴ Therefore, India must accumulate and maintain sufficient military capabilities to protect it against potential threats, even though it should exercise strategic restraint when dealing with security challenges and recognise that '[p]rosperity and economic clout rather than war and aggression will be the key determinants of status in the world community'.⁵⁵

The *social logic of non-discrimination* is another principle for the conduct of inter-state relations. It highlights the formally equal status of all states and opposes 'all forms of political and economic hegemonism'⁵⁶ found, for instance, in treaties or institutions that establish unequal relations among their members such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which, in the words of former EAM Jaswant Singh, created a situation of 'nuclear apartheid ... that arbitrarily decided on the nuclear haves and have-nots'.⁵⁷ While the Nehruvian discourse viewed world politics mainly through the frame of a North/South divide, the post-Nehruvian discourse has differentiated the political space by representing India alongside countries such as China and Brazil as emerging economies that differ from both developing and developed countries: By invoking the notion of emerging economies, the discourse essentially

claims that India should sit at the 'high table' with the major powers but, at the same time, be treated as a developing country in global trade and climate governance and enjoy certain privileges such as the 'principle of common but differentiated responsibility' in the international climate regime.⁵⁸

Hence, the logic explicitly affirms discrimination in India's favour and demands that the world recognise India's status by giving India a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, or recognise India – despite its status as a non-signatory of the NPT – as a nuclear weapons state.⁵⁹ This dimension of the logic of non-discrimination suggests that India is interested less in 'equality for all' but rather in shaping the international order in accord with its interests and using the allegation of discrimination to justify Indian demands and, potentially, to build coalitions with like-minded countries to increase its legitimacy, authority and bargaining power.

The constitutive Others in the post-Nehruvian discourse: political logics

While the discussion of social logics enabled us to shed light on *what* world order means or implies to Indian policymakers who draw on this discourse, political logics deal with the way that meanings and identities are constructed by relating the Self to a series of Others. The post-Nehruvian discourse constitutes meanings and identities primarily in relation to colonialism as temporal Other and Pakistan and China as spatial-political Others.

Colonialism symbolised a collective experience of domination, discrimination, exploitation and suffering and served as a shared negativity for the formation of an Indian national identity. To recall, a nation or state has no given, organic identity or essence, but can only constitute itself and re-produce its identity when there is an Other that can, at least partially, override internal differences (eg between Bengalis, Punjabis, communists, liberals, Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims) and present different identities, interests or demands as equivalent (in relation to the Other). Hence, the Other blocks or threatens the identity of the Self, but makes, at the same time, the (re-)production of this identity possible.⁶⁰ By invoking colonialism as common negation, the post-Nehruvian discourse thus constitutes meanings and identities in opposition to India's own past and recalls the 'foundational moment' of an Indian identity and what unites all Indians: their common opposition to foreign oppression, dictates, discrimination, interferences and exploitation. As a result, the resilience of non-alignment or strategic autonomy in India's foreign policy discourse does not merely embody a strategic choice or ideological position, but is closely intertwined with India's identity and crucial for its re-production.

Though colonialism constitutes a temporal Other in the discourse, it has also a spatial-political dimension in that it places India in opposition to *contemporary* forms of the colonial practices and relations listed above. This implies that the role of the colonial Other can today be assumed by actors which are not directly linked to the colonial era such as the United States, the industrialised countries, transnational corporations or foreign non-governmental organisations (NGO).⁶¹ 'The basic problem of world scenario today', as India's current PM Narendra Modi criticised for instance in 2008, 'is that rich countries consider and dictate [to] the poor and underdeveloped countries as others. They should not dictate but should create structures where everyone's voice is heard. ... It is necessary to democratise the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as they do not have representatives from the developing countries.'⁶²

Though the West can assume the role of the colonial Other in the post-Nehruvian discourse, the discourse has, at the same time, re-constituted the relationship between India and the West, and the US in particular. The construction of a collective identity presupposes that there is a common Other against which this commonality can be constituted. During the Cold War, the shared democratic credentials between India and the United States, for instance, ultimately proved to be insufficient for the construction of a collective identity, because the Western international community was constituted in opposition to the Soviet, communist Other. The Nehruvian discourse, however, did not represent the communist, Soviet bloc as an antagonistic Other that blocked or threatened India's identity. In the post-Cold War era, the West, by contrast, has re-produced its identity against the difference of Islamic fundamentalists and authoritarian regimes and thus against antagonistic Others that are compatible with the economy of identity/difference in India's foreign policy discourse. Designating the Others which 'block' the realisation of a true world order, then-EAM Yashwant Sinha noted in 2003: 'Non-democratic regimes, fostering values of intolerance, fundamentalism, extremism and its favourite child – terrorism are certainly not the building blocks of world order. In fact, they are the biggest roadblocks to its attainment.'⁶³

However, the resilience of the colonial Other in the post-Nehruvian discourse makes the constitution of a collective identity between India and the West more difficult, because it highlights the difference between India – and its hybrid identity – as a post-colonial, developing democracy and the industrialised Western democracies whose affluence and dominance in the world cannot be separated from their colonial and imperial past. This might also partially explain why Indian policymakers have been rather reluctant to associate India with the Western international community and instead assert India's political autonomy and cultural distinctiveness. After all, it was the European colonial Other against which India's national identity was constituted and maintaining this *difference* is crucial for the re-production of India's identity and its role as an independent actor in international relations. As India's former foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal notes, 'India does not want to be simply co-opted into the existing international order that is controlled by the west. It must find its due place in it in its own right and be in a position to change the rules rather than simply adhere to existing ones.'⁶⁴

In addition to colonialism as temporal Other, the post-Nehruvian discourse constructs India's identity as a pluralist actor that can 'align with all' through a geopolitical differentiation between the 'inside' – the Indian nation-state as the space of pluralism, diversity and syncretism, where different religious, ethnic and linguistic groups allegedly co-exist peacefully⁶⁵ – and the 'outside' – the international system as a geopolitical space that features a similar plurality to India, but has not yet evolved a political order that provides for peaceful co-existence. By asserting that India has found a way for the peaceful contention of antagonisms, the discourse represents – the universal signifier – world order in accordance with India's own – particular – experiences. The discourse simultaneously constructs the international system as a 'threatening outside', which challenges India's pluralist identity, be it through inter-civilisational conflicts, religious fundamentalism or the demand to join particular power blocs (as during the Cold War), and also uses this 'threatening outside' as a common negation to re-produce the notion of India as an inherently pluralist country that can allegedly accommodate differences and therefore make an important contribution to world order.

This 'threatening outside' is symbolised in the post-Nehruvian discourse by Pakistan and China in particular which serve as significant spatial-political Others for the self-constitution of India as a pluralist, democratic and non-violent actor. Given Pakistan's identity as a Muslim state on the basis of the Two-Nation Theory, the post-Nehruvian discourse constructs Pakistan as an antagonist that challenges India's secular-pluralist state identity⁶⁶ and, by extension, as the Other that must be overcome to realise a political order in the spirit of (international) unity in diversity. While the presence of the Islamic and hostile Pakistan is a permanent reminder of India's fragile nationhood and is constructed as an obstacle for the completion of India's identity, it also allows the discourse to articulate the secular, pluralist, democratic and peaceful India as a superior actor that is set in opposition to the authoritarian, fundamentalist and militaristic Pakistan.⁶⁷ This representation also appeals to Hindu-nationalists in India who invoke India's secular national identity to underscore India's superiority towards Pakistan and the inherent peacefulness and tolerance of Hinduism,⁶⁸ which is contrasted with the 'Muslim invasions' of the Indian subcontinent, Islamist terrorism and Pakistan's aggressions against India.

Unlike Pakistan, which symbolises in many respects the antithesis to India, China is represented by the discourse in a more ambiguous way in the sense that China is both a rival and a partner, a challenge and an opportunity and a source of fear and of admiration. For the post-Nehruvian discourse, China's size, its status as an ancient civilisation and the fastest growing economy in the world and its experience of imperialism mirror in many ways India's own identity.⁶⁹

The Othering of China plays an important role in India's self-constitution as an 'emerging power' in that it helps to maintain the legitimacy of the Indian state, its economic reforms, military modernisation and its assertion to play a more influential role in Asia and on the global level. On the one hand, the post-Nehruvian discourse suggests that India needs to emulate China's economic and foreign policies and 'emerge as [a] stronger, if not an equal, military and economic power'.⁷⁰ On the other hand, the post-Nehruvian discourse differentiates the 'emergence' of the democratic India from the 'rise' of the authoritarian China. In this process of Othering, China is represented as an assertive and expansionist power, which oppresses internal dissent and displays hegemonic attitudes in Asia, while India is constituted as a benign, responsible and non-threatening power, which respects diversity and does not seek to dominate or bully other countries. As India's preeminent strategic analyst and government adviser K. Subrahmanyam stated:

Whenever a major power emerges, the rest of the international system voices concerns about the aggressive nature of that power. ... there is concern all over the world that a non-democratic China wants to become the untethered hegemon first of Asia, and then of the world. There are no such fears about India. ... the emergence of India [is] greeted as a uniquely non-threatening phenomenon, unprecedented in history.⁷¹

'Unlike China's rise', Manmohan Singh agrees, 'the rise of India does not cause any apprehensions. ... The world takes a benign view of India. They want us to succeed'.⁷² By Othering China, the post-Nehruvian discourse can represent India's growing political, economic and strategic engagement and influence in its 'extended neighbourhood' as a natural expression of India's legitimate interests, while China's growing role in Asia and the Indian Ocean indicates that China might attempt to 'resurrect its traditional and historical "Middle Kingdom" position of predominance'⁷³ and seek hegemony in Asia.

The post-Nehruvian discourse and Indian exceptionalism: fantasmatic logics

Having discussed the social and political logics underpinning the post-Nehruvian discourse and its conception of world order, we will now turn to the discourse's fantasmatic logics. Against the backdrop of the purely relational character of identities and the resulting impossibility of fully constituted identities, fantasies offer the illusion of completeness and identities that can be grounded on some stable foundations that define 'who we are' and thus our place in the world. The post-Nehruvian discourse, as argued here, features such a fantasy in the form of the notion of Indian Exceptionalism.

The idea of Indian Exceptionalism suggests that India is a unique symbol of tolerance, pluralism and peaceful co-existence and has the moral capacity for leadership in global politics. Constructivists, who have illuminated the nature, content and origins of this idea, argue that the notion of Indian Exceptionalism is a deep-seated identity source and has shaped Indian foreign policy until today.⁷⁴ They derive the notion of exceptionalism from Partha Chatterjee's reading of the colonial encounter and the formation of an Indian nationalist imaginary. Accordingly, confronted with the materially superior culture of the colonisers, India's national leaders drew a distinction between an 'inner' and an 'outer' domain. While they largely acceded to the superiority of the West in the outer domain of statecraft, science and technology and thus sought to emulate the West in those areas, they asserted the superiority of India, and the East in general, in the inner domain of culture, morality and spirituality that must be preserved and protected from the West.⁷⁵ While this account of Indian Exceptionalism can show how the colonial encounter shaped India's identity formation and how India's national leaders simultaneously sought to emulate and repudiate Western modernity, it ultimately essentialises colonialism and India's identity by reducing the latter to the colonial encounter. In addition, this account can explain neither why strong notions of exceptionalism can also be found in countries which were not victims of colonialism (eg Russia) or whose colonial experience was significantly different (eg the United States),⁷⁶ nor why the notion exceptionalism has proved to be so resilient in India.

By excavating the content of the notion of Indian Exceptionalism on the basis of India's official foreign policy rhetoric and studying how this notion has shaped Indian foreign policy, constructivist studies run the risk of providing an account of Indian foreign policy in which India appears to be an obsessively 'moralist', 'different', 'ambivalent' and 'peaceful' nation-state. For example, in order to show that the notion of Indian Exceptionalism shapes Indian foreign policy, Chacko cites statements by Indira Gandhi which depict 'India as a moral actor' and justify India's increasing involvement in Sri Lanka in the 1980s on moral grounds.⁷⁷ Instead of pointing out that political leaders in almost every country in the world have used moral arguments to justify wars and interventions, Chacko seems to suggest that such behaviour would be unique to India.

In contrast to constructivism, a poststructuralist reading of Indian Exceptionalism is less concerned with the question whether India really is an 'exceptional power' or how this notion shapes Indian foreign policy, and rather with how *and* why India is constructed or represented as one. This perspective is informed by poststructuralism's relational ontology which postulates that subjects have no essence or stable identities, but are constructed by discourses which relate differences to confer meaning. While the discussion of political logics in the previous section has shown how India's identity has been constituted against the

difference of various Others, the conceptualisation of Indian Exceptionalism as fantasy shows how the post-Nehruvian discourse seeks to conceal the missing fullness of the Indian identity by attributing it an imaginary timeless essence and linearity. In other words, the fantasy symbolises the myth about the founding history of India and seeks to obscure that India – like any other nation – is an imagined community, whose identity cannot be grounded on a stable or natural foundation and is thus in *permanent* need of re-production. The fantasmatic narrative represents India as ‘a fundamentally “open” society’ that ‘has learnt to accommodate and assimilate over the ages’ and ‘received and absorbed major influences from outside, like Islam and Christianity, and radiated cultural influences, outward’ in ‘the spirit of peace, co-existence and tolerance.’⁷⁸

The narrative, which emerged during India’s independence struggle, was most compellingly told by Jawaharlal Nehru in his *Discovery of India*, in which India’s past, as Sunil Khilnani notes, is ‘told as a tale of cultural mixing and fusion, a civilizational tendency towards unification that would realize itself within the frame of a modern nation state.’⁷⁹ The fantasmatic narrative constructs India as a civilisational state, whose origin can be traced back to the Aryan-Vedic high culture that symbolised a period of purity, unity, co-existence, prosperity and glory. By grounding Indian identity in an immemorial past and ancient culture, the fantasy provides the Self with a seemingly transcendental foundation and an eternal imaginary essence. It then traces this alleged essence throughout India’s past by establishing a kind of organic link between Buddha, the ancient emperor Ashoka, who turned to Buddhism and became the ‘messenger’ of non-violence, the Mughal emperor Akbar, who is praised for developing a tolerant and impartial strand of Islam, and Mahatma Gandhi, who became the symbol of India’s successful non-violent struggle for independence.

The post-Nehruvian discourse incorporated this foundational narrative of India by representing the globalising, post-Cold War world and the changes in India’s foreign and economic policy (eg economic liberalisation and policy of multi-alignment) as being in keeping with Indian identity and thereby providing the Indian Self a ‘foundational guarantee’ in times of change and uncertainty. As then-EAM S. M. Krishna noted in 2012:

As our world is globalizing, our societies and communities are becoming more diverse. We now have unprecedented possibilities to spread prosperity, but we are also bound deeply by shared vulnerabilities. ... As a pluralist democracy that stands at the cultural cross-roads of Asia and many of its fault lines, India will serve as a bridge across the region’s – and, indeed, the world’s – great diversity.⁸⁰

While this idea of India as a nation-state which is not based on a common language, culture or religion but forged in diversity has a universal aspiration and significance in that it postulates that there is no contradiction between political order and diversity, it has been challenged by events and phenomena that exceed this discursive representation of India: the violent partition of British India, separatist movements within India, communal violence or India’s inability to establish cordial relations with most of its South Asian neighbours which predominantly view India as a ‘regional bully.’⁸¹ Through the fantasmatic narrative of Indian Exceptionalism, the post-Nehruvian discourse can present these phenomena as anomalies in a long history of peaceful co-existence and mask over the essential incompleteness of Indian identity by projecting this lack onto various Others: the British colonial rulers, the irredentist Pakistan or the ‘hegemonistic’ China that is blamed for ‘wooing away’ South Asian

countries and undermining India's goodwill in the region.⁸² By scapegoating a range of Others, the discourse can preserve a close link between India's identity and foreign policy and prevent a dislocation of this identity.

Conclusion

Drawing on a poststructuralist, discourse theoretical framework, this article de- and reconstructed the conception of world order in India's dominant foreign policy discourse in the post-Cold War era. It sought to contribute to a 'Post-Western IR' by analysing Indian textual sources and the understandings of world order constituted therein. At the same time, the article sought to go beyond the contextualised self-interpretations of Indian policymakers and avoid an essentialist, Indo-centric conception of world politics by employing 'theoretical concepts and logics not readily available to social actors themselves'⁸³ that enable us to illuminate (1) what understandings of Indian identity and world order exist in the discourse (social logics); (2) how these meanings are (re-)produced by relating the Indian Self to international Others (political logics); and (3) why a particular discourse appeals to subjects by offering a sense of wholeness through a fantasmatic narrative that endows India with a perpetual, imaginary essence and thereby masks over the incompleteness of India's identity (fantasmatic logics).

India's dominant foreign policy discourse takes polycentrism as the essential feature of world order and represents India as pluralist, multi-aligned actor that can and should engage all major powers. The article argued that the discourse has used foreign policy and world order as sites for the re-production of a particular representation of Indian identity: India is a secular, pluralist nation-state that can in both its internal and external affairs accommodate differences. By representing world order in accordance with India's national experiences and asserting that India has found an institutional framework for peaceful co-existence, the discourse seeks to heave India to a position from which it can represent the universal: the ideal of a global political community. Hence, similar to the discourses of Western actors, the Indian foreign policy discourse attributes universal significance to its particular experiences and identity and thereby attempts to place India in the centre of a multipolar world order. However, the very constitution of India as an actor that can accommodate differences depends on difference, thus exposing the limits of India's identity. The rise to power of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Narendra Modi, who contests India's pluralist and secular credentials, is the latest embodiment of this lack and shows that India – like any other nation – has no essence, but is constituted by competing discourses that seek to hegemonise a particular meaning of Indian-ness.

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Notes

1. Ikenberry, "Liberal International Order and Its Discontents."
2. Hobson, *Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*; Acharya, *Rethinking Power*.
3. See, for instance, Cohen, *India: Emerging Power*; Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*; Pant, "Rising India's Search for a Foreign Policy."
4. See Mehta, "Still under Nehru's Shadow?"; Chatterjee-Miller, "The Un-Argumentative Indian?"
5. Sagar, "State of Mind"; Bajpai, "Indian Grand Strategy."
6. Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*; Malone, *Does the Elephant Dance?*
7. Ganguly, "India in the Liberal Order."
8. Ollapally, "India: The Ambivalent Power", 206–208; Chacko, *Indian Foreign Policy*, 3; Sullivan, "India's Ambivalent Projection of Self", 27–30.
9. Hurrell, "Beyond Critique."
10. Post-Western IR refers to attempts to go beyond 'Western' experiences, texts and practices and create a more global-oriented discipline. This article uses the term post-Western IR rather than non-Western IR to avoid essentialising different geo-cultural spaces and to highlight their mutual co-constitution and interactions.
11. Campbell, *Writing Security*.
12. Cf. Sullivan, "Exceptionalism in Indian Diplomacy"; Holsti, "Exceptionalism in American Foreign Policy."
13. Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*; Solomon, *Politics of Subjectivity*.
14. Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*.
15. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 108.
16. Ibid., 105.
17. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolutions*, 31ff.
18. Campbell, *Writing Security*, 9, 12.
19. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolutions*, 17–21.
20. Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 16, 19.
21. Solomon, *Politics of Subjectivity*, 15, 37ff.
22. Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*, 130, 145.
23. Nabers, *Poststructuralist Discourse Theory*, 142–3.
24. Wojczewski, "Global Power Shifts and World Order."
25. Laclau, "Identity and Hegemony," 58.
26. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, x.
27. Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*, 136.
28. Khilnani et al., *Non-Alignment 2.0*; Sibal, "India's Foreign Policy"; Tharoor, *Pax Indica*.
29. Saran, "India and Multilateralism," 54; cf. also Hall, "Multialignment and Indian Foreign Policy"; and Basrur, "Modi's Foreign Policy Fundamentals."
30. Rao, "Speech at the French Institute of International Relations."
31. Malone, *Does the Elephant Dance?*, 257.
32. Saran, "An India Allying with None."
33. Subrahmanyam, "NAM or Never"; Mishra, "India, United States and the New World Order," 350; Dasgupta, "Rising China, Emerging India."
34. Bhattacharyya, "India and China: New Directions," 708.

35. Tharoor, *Pax Indica*, 425.
36. Mishra, "India, United States and the New World Order," 350.
37. Menon, "Address by Foreign Secretary."
38. Ahamed, "Keynote Address at the Valedictory Function"; Khurshid, "Inaugural Address at Annual International Studies Convention."
39. M. Singh, "Peace, Non-Violence and Empowerment."
40. Khilnani et al., *Non-Alignment 2.0*, 31.
41. See Hall, "Multialignment and Indian Foreign Policy," 271; Basrur, "Modi's Foreign Policy Fundamentals," 14, 24.
42. Menon, "New Dimensions of Security."
43. Lok Sabha, *Statement Made by Minister of External Affairs*.
44. Dubey, "Reform of the UN System and India," 175ff.
45. Singh Puri, "Statement on Implementing the Responsibility to Protect."
46. Sibal, "India's Position on Syria."
47. Sikri, *Challenge and Strategy*, 284ff.; *Economic Times*, "Russia Has Legitimate Interests in Ukraine," June 3, 2014.
48. M. Singh, "PM's Address to IFS Probationary Officers."
49. Ministry of External Affairs, *Annual Report*, 1.
50. M. Singh, "PM's Address to IFS Probationary Officers."
51. Rasgota, "New Asian Power Dynamic," 17; Sibal, "India's Foreign Policy."
52. Khurshid, "Inaugural Address at Annual Convention of Indian Association."
53. Sinha, "Diplomacy in the 21st Century," 66; Menon, "Role of Militaries in International Relations."
54. M. Singh, "PM's IDSA Anniversary Speech."
55. Sinha, "What It Takes to be a World Power."
56. Bharatiya Janata Party, *Foreign Policy Resolutions*, 67.
57. J. Singh, *India at Risk*, 167–8.
58. Saran, "India and Multilateralism," 47ff.
59. Saran, "Present Dimensions of the Indian Foreign Policy."
60. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 125.
61. See Advani, "NDA Regime and National Security," 27–8; Sikri, *Challenge and Strategy*, 5.
62. Quoted in *The Hindu*, "Modi for Shift in Development Strategy," November 17, 2008.
63. Sinha, "India and the Emerging World Order," 191.
64. Sibal, "India's Foreign Policy."
65. M. Singh, "Peace, Non-Violence and Empowerment."
66. Dubey, *India's Foreign Policy*, 53ff.
67. Mukherjee, "Address by the Defence Minister"; Sikri, *Challenge and Strategy*, 33, 39.
68. Advani, "Statement by Minister."
69. See Vajpayee, "Speech at Peking University"; Mukherjee, "India's Foreign Policy Today."
70. Dubey, *India's Foreign Policy*, 200.
71. Subrahmanyam, "Making Sense of China."
72. Quoted in *The Tribune*, "World Wants Us to Succeed", <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2010/20100418/main2.htm>, April 17, 2010.
73. Gupta, "India's 'Look East' Policy," 352.
74. Ollapally, "India: The Ambivalent Power"; Chacko, *Indian Foreign Policy*; Sullivan, "India's Ambivalent Projection of Self."
75. Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*, 6ff.
76. Cf. Holsti, "Exceptionalism in American Foreign Policy."
77. Chacko, *Indian Foreign Policy*, 150.
78. Mukherjee, "Address by the Defence Minister."
79. Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, 166.
80. Krishna, "India's Foreign Policy Priorities."
81. Mitra, "The Reluctant Hegemon."
82. Sikri, *Challenge and Strategy*, 16, 107.
83. Howarth, "Applying Discourse Theory," 320.

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